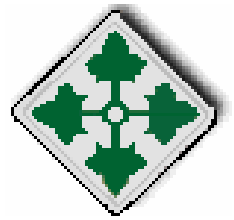




DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, 2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 8th Infantry
4th Infantry Division (Mechanized)
Forward Operating Base Kalsu, North Babil, Iraq



January 9, 2006

A Letter Home

Dear Sir, Mme, or Ms:

I know that it seems ambiguous, but to me it sounds (or reads) more personal, than to just address it "To whom it may concern". I am a US Soldier serving with 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, part of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized). My rank or title should really be immaterial, since I am just a small component of the collective consciousness, and part of the "well-oiled" machine that is the US Army. That does not mean that I consider myself insignificant or irrelevant, it simply means that I am part of something much greater, and far reaching than a single person could ever be.

For the benefit of the reader, or readers, I will introduce myself. My name is Carlos J. Badillo. I am a Captain in the US Army. My primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) is Field Artillery (13A). Believe me, there is not a whole lot of cannon and rocket shooting around here. But that does not mean that I am out of a job. Uncle Sam is very good about ensuring that our Soldiers are gainfully employed. Because of my Field Artillery background, and the synchronization of multiple battlefield effects and combat systems that is part of the daily Fire Support Officers duties, I have been appointed the Battalion's Information Operations Officer. We that title, I also inherited other duties as well, such as: Civil Military Operations Officer, and Battalion Claims Officer (Christmas came in early, and full of gifts!). To you it may seem that there are too many titles, acronyms, and technical names. But those are just part of the Soldier's daily life and professional development. I also talk about my duties so that you may understand of how they affect my role in our unit's mission and my personal feelings.

As my unit's Information Operations Officer, I am responsible for assessing the perception of the local population regarding coalition forces and our allies, the security forces of a sovereign Iraq (Army and Police). I am also responsible for educating our soldiers about the local culture and to serve as some sort of liaison between our leadership and theirs. This seems like a rather general description of my duties, but I'm a fair believer in using laymen's terms. Besides, the rest of my duties are rather complicated, and at this point irrelevant to this letter. As I previously told you I am also the Civil Military Operations Officer. That is a much straightforward job. In that capacity, I am the liaison between the local government, community elders (Sheiks), professionals and merchants, and our unit's chain of command. I am also responsible for assessing infrastructure needs. Mind you that I have never received professional training on this capacity; however, I do work very closely with a group of very dedicated Soldiers and professional individuals from Civil Affairs, who are well trained in this type of assessment. My last official duty is as Claims Representative. In this capacity, I am responsible for interviewing local nationals who present claims against the US Government (Armed Forces), consisting of damage to their personal property and/or personal injury.

All three of the previously mentioned duties are very demanding, and consume a great portion of my time until late in the night, seven days a week. What makes them even more challenging is that each of those duties requires that I maintain an incredible degree of objectivity. This is where the problem lies. As a US Soldier and Officer, I am required to look after our country's best interests, and ensure that the conditions are set for mission success. On the other side of the coin, in order to be successful I must also ensure that the needs of the Iraqi people are met. This needs to happen by ensuring that our soldiers are polite and professional in their everyday dealings with the local population and with their Iraqi security forces counterparts. We must all be sensitive to their culture, and try to de-escalate any potential situations that develop due to cultural misunderstanding or just simply too much "Joe go get'em attitude". I must also ensure that when any misunderstanding results in accidental damage to Iraqi property or injury to civilians during the course of our routine security operations, or in response to threats by terrorists, that the Iraqi victims are afforded the opportunity to submit a claim.

All of these must be done while I juggle meetings with local officials, city councils, or impromptu trips to inspect on-going infrastructure repair projects in order to enhance the quality of life of the local population.

Every so often, I complain to myself and to the few colleagues unfortunate enough to be around me when I vent, about how busy I am, and about why we have to bust our tails to take care of "somebody else's problems." Then after a few moments I realize how selfish I am being. When the Lord asked Cain about the whereabouts of his brother Able, his reply was "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Cain probably knew the right answer, but chose to lie to God and to himself. I am

not trying to influence anyone's religious beliefs, that is a matter of personal choice. However, I am well aware of my personal convictions, and am not ashamed of them. Regardless whether you believe in God, or any other kind of higher power, there are a set of basic moral beliefs, gut level values, if you will, that are universal. These include respect for human lives, respect for human dignity, defense of the weak, and try our best to live in harmony with nature. These values can be observed throughout the world, conveyed in just about any language, and often understood with just a look, and the measure of our actions.

I have come to realize that this is the reason for our missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and any other place where our armed forces are called into action. I, like millions of other Americans, may or may not agree with the politics driving the decisions to send our forces into action, and thus put us in "harm's way". My job is not to formulate policy, but to enforce it. Once I signed on the dotted line and I said..."so help me God" I made a commitment to the people of the United States and to our government to do my job to the best of my ability. And so I try to do so every day! I do it armed with the best technology and training available in the world. But most important of all, I do it with the greatest faith in my God, and faith that my brothers in arms are equally trained, and committed to the mission and to the bonds that are formed between us due to the experience of the hardships of combat.

It is often said that with great authority, often comes great responsibility. The Gospel puts it even more plainly: "From everyone who has given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). Our nation is often called the greatest experiment in Democracy and Freedom. I have come to realize that it was not an experiment, but part of a chain of events that have been pre-ordained. It is part of our "Manifest Destiny". The US have been blessed with the natural resources, form of government, and character of its people, which have helped us evolve from a fledgling "experiment" in to the world leader that we are today. While our foreign policy will always be open to question and criticism, our "track record" is by far the best when it comes to helping the needy, protect freedom and democracy, and assisting others to "pull themselves by their bootstraps," as we once did. Our ancestors understood this well from the very beginning when they declared independence and drafted our constitution. Our Grandfathers' (the greatest generation according to Tom Brokaw of NBC) understood this as well as they implemented the Marshall Plan in Europe and Japan, after the bitter battles of WWII. Now it is our moral duty, for our young republic to do the same and help the people of Iraq, the historical Cradle of Civilization. This is what distinguishes America from the rest of the World.

As we go out into the towns, and walk the streets assessing needs, inspecting building projects, and "getting to know our Iraqi neighbors," we always go armed with body armor, rifles, and most of all Faith. We sometimes take enemy fire, and return fire, we also run into some rather "unpleasant surprises", but at the end of the day we ALWAYS run into some Iraqi kids smiling, and giving us the quintessential "thumbs-up" sign. That is why I am here for a second trip (I am veteran of the original OIF). While I am always prepared to engage the enemies of freedom, hope, and justice with my rifle (affectionately known as Stella in honor of my lovely wife), I would rather use other tools and weapons in my arsenal such as: goodwill, respect, and good ole' American giving spirit to combat ignorance, hate, and hopelessness. I sympathize with my mother and millions of other American mothers who fear for the safety of their children in harms way. But we all should also be sympathetic and have solidarity for the mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons that are victims to the violence caused by the terrorists and enemies of a free Iraq. When American Soldiers go out on patrol, they are accompanied by brave Iraqi Soldiers and Police Officers, less equipped than us, but who face the same perils as we do. That is just one of the differences between us. The other one is that God willing at the end of my tour, I will get to go home to Mom, my Wife and Kids, and Apple-Pie, they will remain here fighting for their very own existence alongside a new group of highly motivated GI's.

This letter is a little long; it may be a while before I have the opportunity to send another. But I thought that it was necessary in helping you understand not just as a Soldier, but as an individual as well.

Regards,

Carlos Badillo

CPT, FA US Army